Class Struggle and Socialist Construction in Hungary, 1948-1955

by Andras Zsilak

The combination of internal factors which prepared the way for the counter-revolution in Afghanistan are similar, in certain respects, to those which fueled the Hungarian counter-revolution twenty-five years earlier.

The revolutionary movements in both countries faced a strongly entrenched semi-feudal landowning class whose reactionary politics were combined with close ties to the religious hierarchy. In both the movement was led by a small communist party, with weak ties to the workingclass, and even weaker connections with the rural poor. Both parties came to power as the result of military action rather than a mass popular uprising, and both sought to build socialism by mechanically copying the Soviet model, rather than by basing themselves on the specific conditions of their own countries.

The Communist Party of Hungary was created in November, 1918 under the leadership of Bela Kun, a Hungarian who had been a prisoner of war in Russia during the revolution. When the post world war liberal Karolyi government fell in March, 1919 Kun convinced the Socialist Party to join with the Communists in seizing the reins of power. The resultant Hungarian Soviet Republic lasted until July when it was overthrown by a combination of invading armies. The Communist Party was forced to go underground and was almost destroyed. Its leaders fled, many to Moscow, where some, including Kun himself, were executed in the Great Purges of the 1930s. The party did not again become a significant force in Hungarian life until after the Second World War when Hungary was occupied by the Soviet army.

In the post war period the Communists, led by Matyas Rakosi, who had been a minister in the 1919 Hungarian Soviet Government, cooperated with other parties in a National Independence Front, helping to form a new government. Other important leaders were Erno Gero, in charge of the economy, theoreticians such as Josef Revai and Gyorgy Lukacs, the populist Imre Nagy, and Janos Kadar, who headed the party and state after the Soviet intervention of 1956.

Although the Party sought to lay the basis for socialism in Hungary, its erroneous policies with regard to the workingclass and the peasantry and its sectarian and mechanical conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, particularly after 1948, isolated it from the masses and set in motion a process which resulted in a counter-revolutionary uprising in 1956.

Not surprisingly, Andras Zsilak's article, originally published in Hungary in 1966, reflects a kind of Marxism that predominates in Eastern Europe today. But it would be a mistake to dismiss the article on that account. For, if Zsilak is unable to theoretically articulate the concepts necessary for an accurate assessment of the socialist transition period, these concepts are nonetheless present, in the practical state, in his work.

He speaks, for example, of the decisive need for the party to promote the political activity of the workingclass, and of its error in reducing that task to propaganda for increased production. He also examines the worker-peasant alliance and criticizes the view, prevalent in certain party circles in the late 1940s and early 1950s, that farming, not class struggle, should guide the party's policy in the countryside. Finally, he recognizes that the problems of the Stalin era cannot be understood by the notion of "personality cult," but must be sought in the theory and political practice of those years.

We have edited Zsilak's article for publication in the Theoretical Review. *The full text can be found in* Studies on the History of the Hungarian Workingclass Movement (1867-1966) *edited by Henrik Vass and published by Akademiai Kiado, Budapest, 1975. For all its theoretical inadequacies we think that it presents a practical complement to our knowledge of the difficulties and requirements of socialist transition and provides an historical perspective to our understanding of events in Afghanistan.*

Georg Lukacs in 1919

The circumstances of the post World War II revolutions and of the socialist construction initiated after their victory differed considerably from those amidst which the Great October Socialist Revolution had taken place and the building of socialism had begun in the Soviet Union. Though certain essential features of the October Revolution and of the building of socialism in the Soviet Union also prevailed in the development of the socialist revolutions following World War II, this development had special characteristics. One of the most important of these characteristics was expressed precisely in the devlopment of the relationship between the different classes. The new international balance of power and the interdependence of the struggle for democracy and for socialism made it possible and necessary for the parties to shape their policies of alliances in a new way and in conformity with the new situation, so that the working class would advance on the basis of a broader unity of the social forces. In this new situation, in its struggle for political power and, subsequently, for socialism, the working class could also win over social forces which at the time had not supported the working class in Russia. All of this obviously influenced the forms and methods of the class struggle as well.

As a result of the afore-mentioned causes, the victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Hungary did not bring about a significant political re-grouping of classes, though it changed substantially the conditions for the development of their relations. As the building of socialism became the new task, it became necessary to broaden the alliance of the working classes and to achieve their closer cooperation, as well as to increase the political isolation, economic restriction and expropriation of the exploiting classes. This required, first of all, that the political activity of the working masses be enhanced, that they be intensively involved in directing the state and local governments and economic life as well as that their economic needs be increasingly satisfied. Favourable conditions for this were brought about by the existence of workers' and peasants' power, by the consolidation of the leading role of the united party of the working class, by its greater authority and popularity as well as by the moderation and subsequent cessation of the manoeuvring for positions among the coalition parties.

However, after the victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the relations of the working classes had to change not only quantitatively but qualitatively too. The circle of working class allies had to be broadened and closer cooperation achieved on the basis of the new content and in the interest of new goals. In the earlier period of the people's democratic development the alliance of the working class and the non-proletarian toiling strata had been based primarily on the protection of the latter's small property. This cooperation corresponded not only with their interests but with their personal aspirations as well. However, when the building of socialism began, when the alliance gained new content and new goals, a contradiction arose between the authentic interests and personal aspirations of the small-scale producers.

The objective basis of cooperation between social classes is their community of interests. The real needs of small-scale producers for economic security, for the modernization of production and the improvement of social, cultural and health facilities, objectively concide with the socialist interests of the working class. However, these common interests can only be realized through a further transformation of conditions in agriculture and through the spreading of modern socialist large-scale farming. But this meets with the opposition of the small-scale producers who cling to private property and to the old, outmoded way of life. Therefore, the widening of the alliance and the achievement of closer cooperation was a difficult and complex task despite the prevailing favourable conditions. The Party of the working class had to exercise circumspection and patience in its political, economic and ideological activity. It necessitated a scientifically elaborated system of measures which would take into account the degree of consciousness of the toiling masses, and also a uniform interpretation and consistent application of these measures.

It is relatively simple to theoretically define the relations between the working class and other classes and strata, though negative examples in this field are also provided by the history of the labour movement. It is much more difficult to define and to elaborate a complex system of measures which in everyday practice would serve the aim of creating unity between the working class and the other toiling classes and strata. Lenin often called attention to the vast discrepancy between the theoretical and the practical solutions to this question. Quoting the example of the great French Revolution he stressed the senselessness of such practical measures which do not reckon with the movement of class forces nor with the expectations and aspirations of the different social classes and strata: " . . . the French Convention launched into sweeping measures but did not

possess the necessary base of support in order to put them into effect, and did not even know on what class to rely in order to put any particular measure into effect."

Lenin thus clearly indicated that in the course of elaborating measures one has to take into account not only necessary and possible allies, but also—in fact, most of all—that class upon which the Party is based. This has to be all the more stressed because in its policy of alliances the Party will or can commit the greatest errors if it does not correctly analyze its relations with the very class it relies or should rely upon. The difference of opinion and discussions within the international communist and workers' movement are connected to some extent with this problem as well. However, it is theoretically clear to the Marxist-Leninist parties that it is particularly the interest of the working class that have to be followed with special attention and, when possible, satisfied not only during the struggle for political power, but also in the period of building socialism. The concrete political, social, cultural and other measures, whether these are in regard to the relationship of the Party and the working class or the working class and other classes, may differ and in general have to differ according to country and period, depending on the development of the international and domestic power relations and the accumulation of material goods and cultural values during the building of socialism.

Besides all this one had to take into consideration that in the course of building socialism the change in economic relations was accompanied by the transformation of the social structure. The changes, in terms of the numerical strength and make up of the individual social classes and strata had to be considered. What was perhaps the most important for the elaboration of the policy of alliances was that the composition and interrelationship of the two basic classes, the working class and the peasantry were also subject to significant transformations.

Mainly as a result of the land reform of 1945, the social structure in Hungary changed considerably as early as the first period of the people's democratic development. Though the structure of the population according to main occupations remained almost the same as in 1941, the percentage of workers—including peasants with no more than 0.6 hectares of land—within the whole of the population had decreased from 51% to 37.1%, while the percentage of small-scale farmers increased from 23.1% to 38.6%.

The class of big landowners had ceased to exist in 1945 and the number of capitalists and other exploiters within the population had been reduced to a minimum by the economic measures taken by the state and especially by the nationalizations in 1948-1949.

Besides the changes in class proportion important changes occurred within the individual classes and strata, too, as well as in their interrelations and their attitude towards the tasks of the revolutionary transformation. This refers first of all to the working class and toiling peasantry, both being protagonists of social development, determining its course and pace.

An examination of the statistical data of the class relations in 1948-1949 discloses the obvious fact that the petty-bourgeois-small-scale peasant character of the country had been strengthened, the proletarian base upon which the party could rely in the villages had been greatly narrowed down. At the same time the working class had become more homogeneous and with the attainment of political power, its political authority and influence upon the further development of the country had increased. This was largely due to the spreading of the socialist relations of production in industry.

The Condition of the Working Class

As socialist industrialization began, the size of the working class rose rapidly and its composition also changed greatly. From Januray 1, 1950 to December 31, 1954 the number of industrial workers alone increased by about 300,000, i.e., almost doubled (387,096 in 1949 and 682,108 in 1954). The source of this increase was obviously first of all in the rural population.

As the working class was, within a short time, enlarged by mostly petty-bourgeois and peasant elements, it temporarily had a negative influence on its ideologico-political physiognomy, cultural standards and professional level. The establishment of proletarian power and the fact that the building of socialism had started, undoubtedly released tremendous energies among the workers. But the tens of thousand of former small peasants who had become "workers," with their way of life and their views strengthened temporarily the influence of bourgeois and petty-bourgeois ideologies on the whole of the working class. The tension thus emerging was further strained by the decrease in the general cultural and professional standards of the working class. This temporary decrease was inevitable as a rapid development of socialist industry implied not only an increase in the number of workers in general but of skilled workers in particular. In order to reclassify and to employ new skilled workers, thousands of semi-skilled workers had to be trained and "quickie" courses had to be organized to give them a minimum of training. Consequently the numerical increase of skilled workers was in disproportion with the average qualification of the industrial workers. All this caused, in addition to the political tension due to the "dilution" of the working class, social tensions as well. Production norms and the rate of increase in productivity could not be determined according to the capacities of the workers officially qualified as skilled labourers but lacking actual training and practice.

In order to overcome the temporary tension caused by the changes in the position, social composition, cultural standards and work skills of the working class it was necessary for the Hungarian Working People's Party (MDP) to do two things; on the one hand it had to engage in active political work, and on the other it had to take social and cultural measures which would lead to the stabilization of the working forces in each factory and also to accelerate the process of training the former peasants, who had become workers, to acquire skills and practice.

As socialist construction began the Party leadership made serious efforts to consolidate workers' power and to increase the socio-political influence of the working class. They endeavoured first of all to oust the exploiters from the central and local organs of power and to replace them, above all, by cadres of worker or peasant origins. There is no doubt that this was politically necessary and served to increase the political authority of the working class. The

significance of these measures was, however, diminished by the fact that they were not accompanied by a general upsurge in the political activity of the working class as a whole, although in speeches Party leaders often asserted that it was necessary to rely upon the masses and to promote the political activity of the working class before all else. In practice, however, the labour problem was degraded to one of the administration of the labour force and political work among the workers was reduced to propaganda for stimulating better results in production.

The reason, among others, for the failure to take the necessary steps to solve the above mentioned contradiction, as well as the neglect of political activity in the factories, was that there was no clarity about the functions of the trade unions under the new conditions. Trade-union activity was erroneously limited to the formal organizing of work emulation and its task to promoting the overfulfillment of production targets. When the trade unions attempted to deal with the protection of the workers' interests, these attempts were regarded as avoiding the solution of difficult and unpopular tasks, which the Party leadership saw as an under-estimation of the political maturity of the working class and a trade union break-away from the Party.

This erroneous interpretation of the role of the trade unions was due to fundamentally mistaken social policies. The professed ascetism of the social policies of the party leadership preserved and even deepened at the beginning of the 50s the temporary tensions already referred to, which were due to the nature of the development, although as proletarian power was established and the building of socialism started, there was a turn in the relations of the working class and other toiling classes. This was also shown by the land-slide victory of the Popular Front for Independence in May 1949. 95.6% of the votes cast were for the candidates of the Popular Front, which symbolized the strengthened understanding of the toiling classes and strata and the strengthened confidence in the communists and in the socialist future. The Three Year Plan was fulfilled ahead of schedule (December 1949) and the targets of the first year of the Five Year Plan (1950) were overfulfilled. These facts, especially the latter showed that the attitude of the toiling masses towards work had changed, and this was largely due to the social, health, cultural and other facilities provided by the proletarian state. These measures inspired justified confidence on the part of the masses since they signified the implementation of the principle laws of socialist progress.

This confidence appeared all the more justified since the speeches and the documents of the Unification Congress of the two workers' parties in June 1948 set the goal of further improving social welfare policies. After three and a half years of difficulties it became finally possible—said Matvas Rakosi at the congress—to "raise the welfare, economic and cultural standards of the population . . . to that extent and at such a pace as is expected of a democratic state." But a few months later Rakosi and other leaders of the Party had already made declarations not about possibilities of improving the living standard but about the need for austerity and sacrifices.

It would be unrealistic to maintain that the building of socialism does not require great efforts and often sacrifices too, and that in socialism there are no periods of stagnation or even recession in the living standard. Among factors influencing the development of living standards it is sufficient to mention the deterioration in international relations, natural disasters, or the very need to lay down the foundation of a more rapid development. But the declarations quoted above did not refer to this, but, on the contrary, formulated a conception which disregarded the principle of caring for the needs of the people and glorified the Spartan spirit of austerity and sacrifice. Due to the adaptation of this Spartan spirit, the real per capita wage of the workers and employees decreased from 1949 to 1952 by 18% and of industrial workers by 16% while national income rose by 50%.

The party leadership tried to compensate for the consequences of the social policies proclaimed in the second half of 1948 by standardizing wages and by occasionally increasing nominal incomes. In itself, the equalizing of wages was necessary and correct, since the wage proportions inherited from the counter-revolutionary regime were in fact unjust. But this was done mechanically, by substantially reducing the wages of well paid categories of workers and simultaneously raising the incomes of other categories, while the average real wages of the workers were decreasing instead of increasing. Though in 1953 nominal wages per capita were 63% higher than in 1949, during the same period prices of consumer goods rose by 78% and the price of foodstuffs increased by 119%.

This correction in the wage system had a negative political effect on formerly wellpaid and highly qualified workers, while the general decrease in real wages resulted in the disillusionment of those categories of workers too whose living conditions had relatively and temporarily been improved merely by the equalizing of wages. At the beginning of the 1950s this policy played no small role in the excessive lack of discipline, in the greater turn-over in the labour force, in the abuse of production norms and sick benefits, in thefts, industrial accidents, etc. The leadership failed to create such social and cultural conditions in the factories which could have counter-balanced or even eliminated these tensions.

At its meeting on October 31, 1953 the Central Leadership obligated the Political Committee and urged the Government to work out the measures which would advance the further improvement of the economic, social and cultural conditions of the working class. "All possible economic resources have to be utilized to improve services for the working class, to ensure better working conditions and labour safety, as well as to extend social, cultural and sport facilities in the factories. The wages and working conditions of miners, who perform hard physical labour and are especially important for the national economy and the wages of the lowest paid workers have to be adjusted. Proper proportions have to be established in the wages of the different categories of workers," stated the Political Committee's report.

Due to the steps taken by the government regarding wages and the reduction of consumer prices together with the better supplying of the population, a gradual improvement in living conditions started as early as in the second half of 1953. As a result the average real per capita wages of workers and employees rose by about 4% as compared to 1949.

But in autumn of 1953 these measures of the party and the government were not unreservedly accepted by the workers. These reservations were not unjustified since the measures

had not been preceded by serious calculation, nor were they coordinated. Small wonder then that the result of these insufficiently prepared measures was that work productivity continued to decline, production costs increased and jeopardized the measures intended to improve living conditions.

Party Policy and the Peasantry

The building of socialism that started after 1948, the "Year of the Turning-point" also put the further development of the Party's policy on the peasantry on the agenda. It became necessary to replace the old ideas about how to develop agriculture and about protecting small peasant property with new ones, which would not maintain the status quo, but shape new socialist agrarian relations. Therefore, new factors began to determine the relations between the working class and the peasantry: the demand and the need to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat, to develop the collective farm movement, that is, to carry out the socialist transformation of agriculture.

In elaborating a peasant policy corresponding to the new situation, the Party had to take into account the strengthening of the petty-bourgeois and peasant character of the country as well as the process of equalizing the size of peasant farms which had started with land reform. This meant that the Party had to thoroughly examine the rural class relations which in the main determine the method and pace of socialist transformation. In his essay entitled "Economy and Politics in the Period of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat," Lenin formulated unequivocally the main line of the rural policies to be followed, asserting that "the proletariat must separate, demarcate the peasant toiler from the peasant owner, the peasant worker from the peasant huckster, the peasant who labours from the peasant who profiteers. In this demarcation lies the *whole essence* of Socialism." In other works, as for instance in his speech delivered at the Eighth Congress of the Russian Communist (Bolshevik) Party (RC/B/P) and in his writings explaining the need for and the substance of the New Economic Policy, Lenin reiterated that the development of the relations between the working class and peasantry determined the fate of the revolution. He pointed out that in the relations of the two main classes, after the victory of the dictatorship of the proletariat it was of extraordinary importance to win over the middle peasantry to the cause of the revolution and the building of socialism. At the same time he warned that "the relations between the proletariat and the petty-bourgeoisie are a difficult problem, demanding complex measures or, to be more accurate, a whole system of complex transitional measures."

This system of measures is made more complicated by the fact that with the beginning of the building of socialism further changes take place not only in the composition of the working class but also in that of the peasantry. These changes, in terms of their main trend, are related to both the quantitative growth of the working class and the development of the cooperative movement. The latter is obviously more important from the point of view of the Party's peasant policy. It means that the Party has to define correctly its own relations and those of the working class to a

"Forward Red Soldiers!"
Poster from Hungarian Soviet Republic, 1919

new stratum of peasantry representing the future of the rural population. Its policy has to conform with the changes in the composition of the peasantry, a policy which would also satisfy the expectations of the farmers producing on a small scale, but at the same time induce them to accept socialist forms of farming. From the economic point of view this policy has to simultaneously solve the tasks of laying down the foundation of socialism and extending agricultural production in the village.

In 1948-1949 the Central Leadership put the peasant policy to be pursued under the new circumstances on the agenda on several occasions and during the discussion rejected Imre Nagy's right-wing views which underestimated the capitalist tendencies of small-scale farming and which negated the necessity of the socialist transformation of agriculture. In the "Guideline for Cooperatives" approved in April 1948, the Party defined correctly the main features of its agrarian policy. "In the peoples' democracy—the 'Guidelines' read—possibilities are given for establishing, with the assistance of the State of the working people and relying on the nationalized sector of the economy, such a cooperative system which would drive back capitalist influence and end exploitation in general in our national economy and help develop socialist agriculture by ousting the bourgeoisie from trading, by passing from individual to collective farming in agriculture and by reorganizing agricultural production." The directives pointed out, as a decisive aspect of the problem, that "we must be accepted not only by the most advanced section of the peasantry, but we must advance towards socialism hand in hand with the whole of the working peasantry. . . . Therefore when establishing the cooperative system in the people's democracy the main task is to transform the peasant consumers' cooperatives into general rural cooperatives. And as to these general rural cooperatives, the main task is to promote, in all ways, collective organization of production besides giving effective support to marketing and distribution."

This political line was expressed during the Unification Congress of the two workers' parties as well as at the National Conference of Cooperatives, held a month later.

The Central Leadership in September 1949 still took a correct theoretical position against Imre Nagy and stressed that the peasant problem had to be examined from the point of view of the rural class struggle and not from that of farming. It had to be examined not abstractly but in connection with the building of socialism in all spheres of society. However, as early as in the second half of 1948, there were symptoms of mistrust toward the peasantry and impatience regarding the socialist reorganization of agriculture and later these became dominant. Despite their differences, the views of Matyas Rakosi and Imre Nagy coincided on one point.

They both greatly over-estimated the weight and significance of the middle peasantry in Hungary's social and economic life. Imre Nagy, exaggerating the extent of the equalizing of farm sizes, claimed that "the pivotal factor of farming is the middle peasant" who "is a central figure in the village," and therefore "the problem of the middle peasants has become the key issue of our agrarian policies." And so "the agreement with the middle-peasantry has to be stimulated by a resolute policy and by concessions." By exaggerating the extent to which the peasantry was growing into middle peasants and by proclaiming the need for concessions Imre Nagy stood, in essence, for the freedom of capitalist development in agriculture and on this basis wanted to "consolidate" the alliance with middle-peasantry, while consistently "forgetting" the poor peasants.

Rakosi's supporters also over-estimated the importance and significance of the middle-peasantry, but—in contrast to Imre Nagy—they exaggerated the danger of capitalist tendencies and the predominance of the kulaks. In the struggle against this they put the winning of the middle peasants at the center of party activity in the villages. However, they sought to reach this goal not by making the necessary "concessions" by supporting the output of the individual peasants or by properly reconciling this support with the aim of achieving the socialist transformation of agriculture. Instead they tried to achieve this on the one hand by flattering the middle peasants and on the other by waging a relentless struggle against and terrorizing the kulaks. At best this policy made the middle-peasantry cautious and suspicious, rather than getting them to dissociate themselves from the kulaks. As attention was focused on the middle-peasantry and as winning them over was solely related to the struggle against the kulaks, the result was that essentially the poor peasantry was disregarded by the Rakosi leadership as well and not only from practical considerations and not even always unintentionally.

This obviously does not mean that the task of winning over the middle peasants could not or should not have been put at the centre of the Party's agrarian policies after the beginning of socialist construction. The winning over of the middle-peasantry was indispensible in Hungary for the victory of socialist cooperative farming and thus for an upsurge in agricultural output. Lenin always stressed the importance of this. But, on the one hand, the question of the alliance with the middle-peasantry was not emphasized in Lenin's works and in the agrarian policy of the RC/B/P because of the numerical strength of the middle-peasantry entitled it to be the "central figure in the village," but because the party had substituted the former policy of neutralizing the middle peasantry with a policy of winning them over. On

Imre Nagy

Matyas Rakosi

the other hand, when directing the party's attention towards the interests of the middle-peasantry and to the importance of a policy and practice of satisfying these interests in harmony with the building of socialism, Lenin was urging the improvement of the whole Party activity in the villages. Therefore, when underlining the necessity of winning over the middle peasantry, Lenin never forgot the importance of relying on the poor peasants. The opening sentence of the Eighth Congress of the RC/B/P resolution on the relationship to the middle-peasntry also reaffirmed the programme that had been approved according to which "In its rural activity the RC/B/P will continue to rely upon the proletariat and semi-proletariat of the rural population, organizing them first of all into an independent force by establishing rural party cells, poor-peasant organizations, special types of trade unions for the rural proletariat and semi-proletariat, etc., in every way bringing them closer to the urban proletariat and freeing them from being influenced by the interests of the rural bourgeoisie and small-proprietors.

But Matyas Rakosi and his group, which monopolized the party leadership, did not act upon Lenin's advice and also broke with the spirit of the programme-like documents elaborated in the spring and summer of 1948. This was the main cause of the errors in the rural policies and measures of the Party. The consequences of these errors was that not only one or another section of the rural population was hard hit but so was the toiling peasantry as a whole, thus weakening the alliance of the working class and the peasantry. Of the mistakes in the party's agrarian policy it is necessary to point first of all to the distortion of the system of compulsory delivery which permeated the whole *rural activity* of the Party. The annual increase of the compulsory

delivery norms as well as the low prices resulted in the peasantry becoming disinterested in production. The penalties the peasants had to pay for defaulting in deliveries and the other forms of molestation induced undesirable political reactions among the peasants. The progressive norms of compulsory delivery were a heavy burden of course on the richer peasants too, but their being increased annually struck first of all at the lowest categories of the poor peasantry. Therefore, despite the fact that the delivery system was based on progression, it was precisely the poor peasants or the lower middle class peasants who were unable to acquire surplus grains and often, in fact not even the portion allowed primary producers after meeting their delivery obligations remained. Therefore they were hit by the grain prices not only as sellers, but also as buyers; (they received eighty *forints* for two hundred-weight of wheat from the State but had to pay five hundred *forints* for the same amount on the open market).

Though the living conditions of the toiling peasantry did not improve in this period, political and cultural life in the villages still had changed considerably because of the numerous achievements of socialist construction. The system of local councils, introduced in 1950, objectively brought about the activization of toiling peasant masses and of their participation in local leadership. The councils, as democratically elected organs of local self-government, proved able, despite the emerging dispositions in Party policy, to involve growing numbers of people in local administration and in controlling the work of its apparatus. As to cultural development, mention must be made first of all of the electrification of about a thousand villages by the end of 1952, bringing them, in the fullest sense of the word, brightness and light. This was also a period when books, press, cinema and radio veritably conquered the villages. The policy of the workers' and peasants' state with regard to public education, first of all the introduction of the eight grades of comprehensive elementary schooling, served, above all, to eradicate the cultural backwardness of the villages. One of the great revolutionary achievements of this period was that of opening the doors of the secondary schools, colleges and universities to peasant youth.

All this, along with several other changes of historic importance, obviously diminished, though not neutralized, the negative effect of mistakes in the rural policy of the Party. At the beginning of the 50s peasants were not induced any more to join cooperatives by their confidence in the Party but under the pressure of the negative consequences of its rural policy. The peasants' small farms were unable to meet the demands of the families and therefore some owners were seeking better living conditions in the cooperative farms. But it cannot be said that better conditions were found in all cases. It is true, however, that the majority of the peasants who had joined the cooperative farms found in them more secure sources of income and were living amidst better circumstances than the majority of the non-cooperative peasants. This was so even though the real amount of the average consumption of cooperative farm families was lower than that of individually farming families.

The Popular Front

The basic requirement of the dictatorship of the proletariat is the implementation of the leading role of the revolutionary, Marxist-Leninist party of the working class, the consistent implementation of the policy of the building of socialism. This, however, does not at all exclude the possibility of several parties functioning amid the conditions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, even such parties, which do not always identify themselves with the endeavors of the communist party, but are not enemies of socialism and support at least those measures which coincide with the direct interests of the masses they represent. According to the Marxist-Leninist theory of the state, the multi-party system is not a criterion or precondition of the dictatorship of the proletariat, just as the one-party system is not. For theoretical or political reasons the socialist state may limit the activity of democratic parties, it may dissolve them and "form" new uninfluential ones. This, however, can hardly promote the cause of socialism. Historical experience proves that a multi- or one-party system under the dictatorship of the proletariat objectively depends on the traditions and the political reality of the nation.

In the case of the multi-party system the alliance of the classes is embodied in the alliance of the parties, though all the parties try to win over directly all the possible allies of the classes they represent. The cooperation of the different parties depends, of course, on the interests of the classes they represent, which also determines the forms of this cooperation. During the years of World War II and later on in the people's democracies the most widespread forms of this cooperation were the different variants of the people's front. The popular front, especially during the building of socialism, need not inevitably exist only as an alliance of different parties. Even in the event of a multi-party system it is not merely a means of cooperation of the parties and the coordination of the social classes and strata they represent, but also a common organization or movement of party members and non-party-people belonging to the same class. In Hungary the popular front movement developed rather as a cooperation of the parties and the classes they represented, and sometimes they were in conflict with one another. The Hungarian National Independence Front was, from the beginning, encumbered by contradictions. It became a loose government coalition as a result of the divergent aspirations of the parties involved and by their different views about the democratic transformation. The coalition itself was more an arena of party struggles than an organization for the collaboration of the democratic forces.

The shift in power that occured in 1947-1948, the swing to the left that started within the coalition and especially in the Smallholders' party, which was the right wing of the coalition, as well as the preparation for the unification of the two workers' parties and then the unification itself brought about new conditions for the cooperation of the coalition parties. As the building of socialism became an actuality the earlier programme and forms of collaboartion of the national forces became obsolete. This necessitated giving new content and form to the popular front movement. The resolute swing to the left that had begun in the Independent Smallholders' Party and in the National Peasant Party made this possible.

Jozsef Revai, member of the Political Committee and the main theoretician of the Party, said that the unity of power and government, essential to socialist progress, was compatible with a multi-party system, adding the following reservations: (1) that the representatives of the exploiting classes be ousted from the allied parties and their influence eliminated; (2) that inter-party squabbles be substituted by joint activity and the role of the working class strengthened.

Thus, as early as at the beginning of 1948, the Party began to propagate the need to transform the Independence Front. It began to lay the ideological and political ground for extending the popular front movement on the basis of a new programme and for the consolidation of the coalition parties' united front.

On the surface it appeared as if the rights of the democratic parties had been given due regard and that the events were carried through in the spirit of broad popular and national unity. In reality, however, this was only a surface appearance. At the turn of the year 1948-1949 various contradictory opinions were often being voiced at closed meetings. These concerned the democratic parties' right to existence and the role and significance of the Popular Front and clearly demonstrated the shift that had already taken place in the popular front policy of the MDP as early as the end of 1948. This change was first manifested at the meeting of the Central Leadership on November 27, 1948, where, contrary to his previous views, Rakosi already stressed not the democratization and the readiness to cooperate of the Smallholders' Party, but rather its duplicity and dangerousness. And at the March 5, 1949 meeting of the same body, shortly before the convocation of the Popular Front Congress, the idea that the mere existence of the democratic parties constituted a constant reserve for the enemy was clearly formulated. According to this, these parties separated the working class from its allies rather than linking them, and therefore their existence did more harm than good to democracy. The Popular Front was therefore to be considered as a means for achieving the withering away of the other parties rather than an organization for coordinating the activity of the democratic parties.

It seems logical to link Rakosi's interpretation of the popular front policy to what caused the break in Party policy, including the policy of alliances and the attitude towards the Popular Front as well, which began in the second half of 1948 and subsequently led to the distortion of the whole policy and activity of the Party. We think that it would be too general to seek the causes in the mistakes of the personality cult. If we would seek the reasons for the mistakes in the erroneous evaluation of the power relations and first of all of the international situation, in the overestimation of the danger of war and in the differences which emerged in 1948-1949 within the international communist movement, then we are closer to the more concrete sources. But this does not include all, nor even the most important causes. We believe that the decisive role in the distortion of the generally correct line established at the turn of the 1947-1948 year was played by the dogmatic conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the counterposing of this to the popular democratic road toward the transition to socialism.

The Dictatorship of the Proletariat

Before analyzing the views held after the second half of 1948 on the dictatorship of the proletariat and the effect this had on the Party's policies, it is necessary to outline briefly their backgrounds. In 1944-1945, at the beginning of the democratic transformation, the Party leadership did not discuss whether the revolutionary transformation taking place under new conditions would enrich with new features the experiences of building the state and of the exercise of power under the dictatorship of the proletariat. The question arose in a new way in the middle of 1946 when the course of revolutionary development and the nature of the people's state had to be defined. At this time, conferring with some leaders of the individual communist parties, Stalin said that the people's democracies could attain socialism in a special way which "need not necessarily follow the Soviet system and the dictatorship of the proletariat." This opinion predominated and was reflected in the position taken at the Third Congress of the MKP. Rakosi said in November 1947: "After the First World War the communists thought that the path to socialism was identical with that along which the Soviet Union was progressing. But after the defeat of fascism, the advance of the people's democratic forces in a number of countries brought about such changes which make it probable that the development in these countries will lead to a transition *into* socialism." (Author's emphasis.)

The supposition of a contradiction between the people's democratic road to socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat already in 1946 stemmed from this dogmatic view that the social base and exercise of the functions of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the mechanism of the structure of its organs of power had to be everywhere and always exactly identical to the Soviet model, irrespective of the changed international power relationships and the situation within the individual countries. Therefore the alleged contradiction was solved in 1946 by choosing the road of people's democratic development and denying the necessity of proletarian dictatorship. This theoretical error had, temporarily, a positive effect on the policies and practice of the Party because it forced the Party leadership to work out an independent policy taking into consideration Hungarian reality.

This attitude was reappraised in the summer of 1948 mainly because of the resolution condemning the activity of the Yugoslav Communist Party, taken in the summer of 1948 by the Bureau of Information of the Communist parties (Cominform), which was founded in September 1947. Though the 1948 meeting of the Bureau of Information apparently only criticized the errors committed by the leaders of the Yugoslav Communist Party with regard to certain concrete issues, the resolution, however, meant a revising of the views on the contradiction between the people's democratic road to socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. The belief continued that people's democratic development was in contradiction with the dictatorship of the proletariat, but this alleged contradiction was now considered solvable by questioning the possibility of a people's democratic road to socialism instead of the necessity for the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Jozsef Revai was the first to assert at the National Educational Conference of the MDP in September 1948 that in Hungary the dictatorship of the proletariat had been established. These ideas were summarized by Matyas Rakosi, in an article in the paper *Szabad Nep,* and later on his statement was confirmed by the Central Leadership, which summarized the various views and added that the people's democracy was a dictatorship of the proletariat without the soviets. It has to be noted here, however, that this formula did not mean the recognition of the specific features inherent in people's democratic development, but reflected the opinion that the dictatorship of the proletariat was not yet perfect in our country, that is, the differences were due to the fact that in Hungary the dictatorship of the proletariat "still wears the features of its origins, the remnants of the transition from the phase of bourgeois democratic transformation" and therefore "it has to approximate the Soviet type of the dictatorship of the proletariat." This, in other words, also meant that once we had a dictatorship of the proletariat—even though not the same as that of the 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet Union—it had to follow the Soviet example as did the whole practice of building socialism.

The new interpretation of the necessity for a dictatorship of the proletariat and the absolutism of the Soviet model chronologically coincided with the beginning of the Party's distorted policy. This process, during which as a result of the dogmatic conception of the dictatorship of the proletariat, Rakosi's group changed from a realistic political policy to a servile imitation of the experience of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, began as early as the second half of 1948.

As a result of the dogmatic interpretation of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leaders of the Party did not take into account the development of the political conditions of building socialism and overstressed, as early as autumn 1948 the oppressive role of the state. Evaluating the 1949 elections, Rakosi pointed out that "one of the functions of the dictatorship of the proletariat is to crush the legal political organizations of the still existing classes." He obviously meant the democratic parties. But it was not possible to crush them by administrative measures because of the vast mass support they enjoyed. An effective means was provided by such a transformation of the Popular Front for Independence which made it impossible for these parties to act independently and thereby, as was said at the time, helped in a given situation to rid the dictatorship of the proletariat of all bourgeois democratic remnants. This was, in a word, the "historic" mission of the Hungarian Popular Front for Independence. Those who think that the Popular Front will have a long life, said Rakosi in March 1949, are very much mistaken. "This Popular Front is, as a matter of fact, one phase in the process of the withering away of the other parties, and perhaps the last one," he said, adding that "we feel that not much will come of this popular-front policy."

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Thus, the way in which the Popular Front was formed, the rights to which it was formally entitled and the relationship which was established between the Party and the Front becomes comprehensible. It is understandable that despite the frequent assertions of the Party's leading role and its pathological anxiety, the jurisdiction of the Popular Front was designated as the participation in the administration and guidance of the people's democratic Hungary and was defined as an organization of democratic forces, the members of which having to completely submit themselves to the decisions of the National Council and execute its decisions. All this was meant to prevent the so-called "other" parties from pursuing any independent activity, since the starting point had always been for the artificial withering away of the Popular Front itself in the shortest possible time. That is why the Popular Front from its inception had merely the formal role of preparing and conducting the elections. And all this did not occur as a result of some kind of spontaneous and slow eclipsing of the Popular Front, nor of the obscurity of its goals as Rakosi's group later claimed in an attempt to avoid responsibility for what had happened.

After the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the leading bodies of the Party began to reexamine the question, but they focused their attention first of all on organizational problems, more precisely, on the kind of organizations to incorporate into the Popular Front so as to strengthen the Party's influence. This formalistic approach, however, was not and could not be successful, as the negative tendencies emerging within the movement were not due to inherent causes, but to the contradictions arising from Party's policy as a whole.

Conclusions

It becomes clear, even from this brief outline of the policy of alliances, that as a result of the dogmatic conceptions and sectarian practice that had been established in the atmosphere of the personality cult, Rakosi's group did not simply err in individual questions but distorted the Party's policy as a whole. They did not take into account the particular possibilities and requirements inherent in the

changed international power relations and in Hungary's internal relationships.

Returning to the starting point of our survey, that is, that the policy of alliances is not an abstract conception, it cannot be separated from the main political line, from the strategic goals and the whole practical activity of the Party, the question arises: how shall we judge the main political line and the strategic goals of the MDP? We believe that no further proof is needed to show that the policy of the MDP was to build socialism. This is unquestionable in the establishment of workers' power, in the establishment of socialist production relations in industry and the development of socialist industry, the spreading of the idea of cooperation in the villages and the consolidation of collective farms, in the abolition of the exploitation and the insecurity of toiling masses, the development and results of the cultural revolution, etc. It is true that this policy was filled with distortions, which were not mistakes arising in the course of constructive work, which could have been made by anyone, but the result of erroneous conceptions. These conceptions, as we have already stated, can be summarized in that fact that Rakosi's group conceived schematically not only the general laws of the building of socialism, but also servilely imitated the Soviet Union's particular methods of putting into effect the laws of development, which, because of the cult of the personality, proved to be wrong in the Soviet Union too. "There was a period in the years following the achievement of the dictatorship of the proletariat," wrote Janos Kadar, "when the leading group of the Hungarian communists did not sufficiently understand and could not concretely apply Lenin's teaching according to which 'the unity of international tactics of the communist working-class movement of all countries demands, not the elimination of variety, not the abolition of national differences . . . ,but such an application of the *fundamental* principles of communism, . . . as will *correctly modify* these principles *in certain particulars,* correctly adapt and apply them to national and national state differences'. Because of these kinds of errors, the general laws of building socialism were obviously also not correctly applied to Hungarian reality."

The distortion of the political line began in the second half of 1948, when it was believed that the supposed contradiction between the dictatorship of the proletariat and the people's democratic road to socialism could be eliminated in the way mentioned above. Following that, Rakosi's group violated ever more rudely the previously avowed principles of economic and social policy and broke with the political practice of the years immediately following liberation, which, despite some mistakes, fundamentally took realities into account. They did not study the development of power relations nor did they work out such a system of practical measures which could have strengthened the unity of the working class, enhanced its influence in society, compensated for and if possible solved the contradictions which were inherent in national unity. Rakosi's leadership increasingly failed to take into account the real situation and especially left out of consideration the needs of the people who were building socialism. In 1948-1949, the conception and practical requirements which proclaimed austerity and regarded the building of socialism as an end in itself, had a direct impact on the attitude of the various classes, weakened the confidence of the masses in the Party, and deepened the developing contradictions inherent in national-popular unity. All this further aggravated the atmosphere of general mistrust, the feverish search for enemies and the neglect of democracy in Party and State life. Consequently, the objective broadening of the social base of socialism, resulting from the changes in class structure, was not exploited.

In July 1956 steps were taken by the Central Leadership of the Party to correct the mistakes, war was declared on the right wing and left-wing deviations. With the removal of Matyas Rakosi in June the Central Leadership eliminated one of the main barriers to the correction of the mistakes. But only one, because Erno Gero, who was elected First Secretary by the Central Leadership, as the one responsible for economic policy was therefore not any less guilty for the failure to carry out the resolution of June 1953. It was therefore not by chance that he failed to analyze the mistakes in his speech at the July 1956 Central Leadership meeting. In fact he said he was not going to open up old wounds.

Thus, from 1949 to 1956 the Party leadership, despite the attempts made in June 1953 and July 1956, was not able to solve correctly, even from a theoretical point of view, the problems related to the policy of alliance. It was even less capable of elaborating a system of practical measures to develop properly the relations between the Party and the working class as well as between the working class and other classes in conformity with the interests of socialism.

This uncertainty, the failure of the attempts made in June 1953 and July 1956, the various interpretations given to the resolutions of the Central Leadership and the postponement of their implementation undermined the authority of the Party, paralysed the forces of socialism and encouraged the domestic revisionist organizers of the counter-revolution. International imperialist reaction ever more openly helped in the ideological, tactical and organizational preparation of the counter-revolution. The leaders of the Party, headed at the time by Erno Gero, were unable to arrest the counter-revolutionary process jeopardizing socialism and the future of the whole Hungarian people. Political deviation had to be eliminated and the errors committed had to be corrected by the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, reorganizing itself in the storm of the struggle against the counter-revolutionary uprising.